

Anxiety

A Principled Approach

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A Bit About Anxiety for Diverse Audiences

- A Bit About Me and a Bit About You
- Why This Topic
- Basic Definitions
- Sharing Some Basic Principles
- Experiential Elements
- Discussion/Ideas/Questions

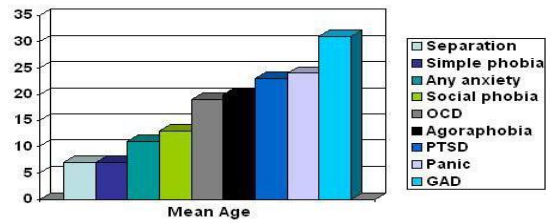
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Why this is important

- Most common cluster of psychiatric disorders in U.S.
- Lifetime Prevalence among adults is 28.8%
- Social Anxiety Disorder is the most common-onset by age 11 in 50% of cases, by 20 in 80%

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Mean Age of Onset



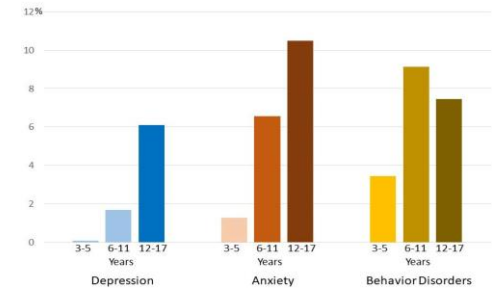
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Anxious Population

- Median age of onset 11 – earliest of all forms of psychopathology
- An estimated 31.9% of adolescents had any anxiety disorder
- 5.9% will have “severe” anxiety disorder
- Girls more likely than boys
- Anxiety in children and teens overlaps with depression
- Only 18 % of these teens receive treatment

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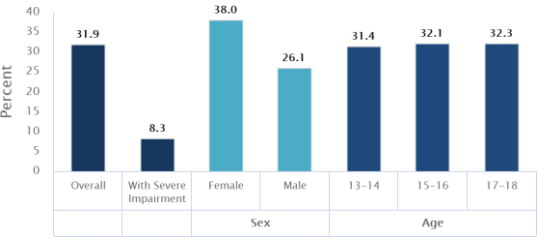
Depression, Anxiety, Behavior Disorders, by Age



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Lifetime Prevalence of Any Anxiety Disorder Among Adolescents (2001–2004)

Data from National Comorbidity Survey Adolescent Supplement (NCS–A)



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What 's Driving the Need?
Complexity of Variables

- Genetics
- Pre Natal
- Temperament
- Developmental course
- Societal Changes
- Family Concerns
- Relationships
- Peer Group Changes
- Media/Communication shifts
- SES/Economy
- Biology
- Disease
- Nutrition
- Pollution/Toxins/accidents and injuries
- Major Life Events
- Accuracy and Timeliness of diagnosis
- Quality of Treatment
- Current Life Events
- Decreased stigma surrounding help seeking

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Two Mindsets

(Carol Dweck, Ph.D)

Fixed Mindset

- Avoid Challenge
- Give up easily
- See effort as fruitless or worse
- Ignore negative feedback
- Feel threatened by success of peers

Growth Mindset

- Open to challenge and even if it is uncomfortable
- Persist in face of setbacks
- See the effort as the path to potential mastery
- Learn from critiques
- Find lessons and inspiration from success of peers

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- Treatment success rates for anxiety disorders with CBT (exposure therapy) range from 60% to 90%
- Tragically low utilization rates (18% compared with 79% for ADHD)

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Various Anxieties

- Myth that it is a monolith
- Different anxieties different treatment emphases
- Underlying nature of experiential avoidance
- Exposure-
Duration
Frequency
Intensity



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Possible Take Home Message

- If you suspect you or someone you know and care about needs treatment for a problem with anxiety, consider working with someone who has:
- Background in Evidence Based Clinical Care
- Understands that ALL ANXIETIES ARE NOT EQUAL In Terms of treatment needs
- Performs a Thorough Assessment Before Beginning Care

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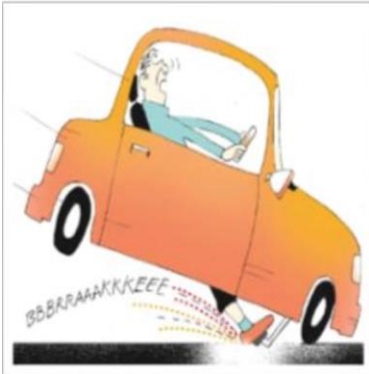


- Basic automatic (a nervous system/hard wired) response
- Specific object or circumstance that involves recognition of actual or potential danger.
- Human beings are hard wired to respond to danger as a survival strategy. This is what kept human beings safe from predators in prehistoric times and it is necessary to our survival to day.
- When we are frightened, our sympathetic nervous system is activated so that we can run, fight or hide to maximize our chances of survival in response to a threat.
- Prolonged, complex emotional state that occurs when someone anticipates a future event, situation or circumstance
- May involve thoughts and ideas about distressing, unpredictable and uncontrollable threats that are imagined/perceived but are not immediately evident.
- Triggered by an initial fear that becomes exaggerated and prolonged and is generally not helpful or adaptive.
- Grips a person as the focus is on future possibilities and induces a state of apprehension and physical arousal in which a person believes he will have no control over an aversive scenario...
- Driven by "what if" thinking...

Para-sympathetic nervous system-
Turns on the part of the system whose job it is to keep us relaxed and balanced, this is like the **BRAKES**
Helps your body, brain and emotions to slow down and relax, saving your energy for when you really need it for a real emergency. Balance is learning to be the boss of your stress and your body. It is learning to regulate your response system and be in charge when the stress response system doesn't need to be working.

Para-sympathetic nervous system-

- Helps us to feel quiet and peaceful
- Feel good
- Feel relaxed and safe
- When activated: heart rate, blood pressure, breathing **slow down**, digestion works like it should and our body feels better
- Muscles relax
- We are better at solving problems

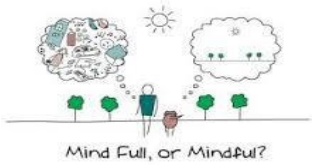


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Mindfulness

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; On purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.”

-- Jon Kabat-Zinn



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The Struggle Switch:
<https://youtu.be/rCp1l16GCKI>

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Possible Take Home Message

Learning about and modeling an understanding of the difference between fear (actual threat) and management of worry

is really important for kids, teens and young adults

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How To Talk With Kids and Teens Who Are Anxious

Model and Assist with STOP Skills

Help validate the fear, and acknowledge the difference between thoughts and facts

Just because we think something, does not mean it is true

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Help Kids think in terms of a range of outcomes when they are foreclosing

Consider a continuum—line from worst to best, and ask “what do you think will probably happen?”

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Relational Frame Theory

- Relational Frame Theory = a contextual behavioral theory that approaches language and cognition as learned behaviors influenced by the context.
 - Relational framing = building or deriving symbolic relations among events (i.e., language and cognition)
 - Derived
 - Arbitrary
 - Symbolic relations
 - Relations not based solely on intrinsic characteristics of the events being related, but also on the context established by social convention and cues. For example, a physically smaller coin, like a dime, can be said to be larger in value than a physically bigger coin, like a nickel.

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Language + and –

Imagine a person and a dog have a repeatedly traumatic experience in the super market
Perhaps both get bitten by a snake in the soup aisle
Your dog might now avoid things that are physically similar to the event like snakes, supermarkets, soup aisles
But only the person may fear and avoid things that are “like” supermarkets, snakes and soup aisles in a way that a dog could never understand like:

- The word snake written in a book
- Campbell’s soup commercial
- Making a grocery list
- Talking about the experience
- Reading about PTSD
- Hearing someone else talk about something painful
- Elevations in heart rate

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Language + and - Continued

- And they might try to escape, control, or minimize these painful reminders in a way that makes life more narrow and less vital.
- But the dog would not
- Treatments for anxiety draw on how learned patterns of thoughts, feelings and sensations influence experience and either limit or expand movement in the direction of what matters most in life

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More on Relational Frame Theory

- Thought Suppression
 - Do not think _____.
 - Rule: If you think _____, then suppress it.
- Word Prisons
 - And vs. But
 - I want to go to the party, BUT I am too depressed.
 - I want to go to the party, AND I am too depressed.

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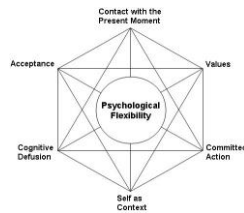
Cognitive Defusion

- Say this over and over and what happens?



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Processes in ACT:
The “Hexaflex”



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Possible Take Home Message

Pay Attention to language used by anxious youth

Begin to listen to fused constructs and consider gently indicating that there may be alternative ways to frame experience

Notice the stories our minds tell us are not necessarily true and important just because we experience them

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Experiential Avoidance

- Behavior aimed at reducing, removing, or escaping contact with unwanted feelings, emotions, or sensations.
 - Can include more overt examples
 - Probably don't need examples here...
 - Private events that serve the function of avoidance
 - Cognitive Rituals in OCD (to suppress anxiety)
 - Rumination in depression (to avoid sadness/fear etc.)
 - Verbal fighting with a spouse (to avoid feeling vulnerable)
 - Procrastination (to avoid feeling inadequate or challenged)
 - Etc. Etc.

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Control is the Problem

Simple Assessment with Kids

What have you tried? How has that worked in the short run? How has it worked in the longer run?

What has it cost you?
Do we keep digging a hole? Or do we climb a ladder?
Quicksand metaphor
Dropping the rope

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Acceptance (Expansion)/Willingness

- Opening up to painful, internal experiences
- Acceptance Metaphors
 - The Unwelcome Party Guest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYht-guvmF4>
 - Passengers on a Bus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>
- Control is the Problem
 - Chinese Fingertrap



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Cognitive Defusion

- Looking at thoughts (Cognitive Defusion) vs. Looking from thoughts (Cognitive Fusion)
 - We want to get untangled from our internal experiences

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Cognitive Defusion

- Looking at thoughts (Cognitive Defusion) vs. Looking from thoughts (Cognitive Fusion)
 - We want to get untangled from our internal experiences
- Other Interventions
 - *Leaves on a Stream* Exercise
 - Pop-up ads on CPU
 - Observe Internal Experiences
 - Genuinely thank your “Brain”
 - What would that thought look like? Color? Shape?
 - What does that thought sound like?
 - So many other interventions are possible!

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Values

- Values work:
 - Identifying and clarifying values
 - Break valued directions into steps or consider a bold move
 - Notice sensations/thoughts/feelings that interfere with taking steps in the direction values
 - Notice what a person does instead of moving Closer to values and how that is linked to avoidance



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Consider Carrots

Rather than a stick—

How is anxiety interfering with important values, aspects of life that matter deeply

How can we help people move, in step wise fashion toward what matters most

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Committed Action

Consider Step Wise Gradual Solutions

Work with Phobias as a guide

Hierarchy's that respect an individual's gradual growth in increasing confidence and competence

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Model of Psychological Flexibility:
The “Hexaflex”



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Control of Thoughts and Feelings Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been adapted from similar ones developed by Steven Hayes, Frank Bond, and others. For each pair of statements, please circle the one that most accurately fits how you feel. The answer you choose doesn't have to be absolutely 100 percent true for you all the time, just pick the answer which seems to be more representative of your general attitude.

1a. I must have great control of my feelings in order to be successful in life.
1b. It is unnecessary for me to control my feelings in order to be successful in life.

2a. Anxiety is bad.
2b. Anxiety is neither good nor bad. It is merely an uncomfortable feeling.

3a. Negative thoughts and feelings will harm you if you don't control or get rid of them.
3b. Negative thoughts and feelings won't harm you even if they feel unpleasant.

4a. I'm afraid of some of my strong feelings.
4b. I'm not afraid of any feelings, no matter how strong.

5a. In order for me to do something important, I have to get rid of all my doubts. 5b. I can do something important, even when doubts are present.

6a. When negative thoughts and feelings arise, it's important to reduce or get rid of them as quickly as possible.
6b. Trying to reduce or get rid of negative thoughts and feelings frequently causes problems. If I simply allow them to be, then they will change as a natural part of living.

7a. The best method of managing negative thoughts and feelings is to analyze them, then utilize that knowledge to get rid of them.
7b. The best method of managing negative thoughts and feelings is to acknowledge their presence and let them be, without having to analyze or judge them.

8a. I will become "happy" and "healthy" by improving my ability to avoid, reduce, or get rid of negative thoughts and feelings. 8b. I will become "happy" and "healthy" by allowing negative thoughts and feelings to come and go of their own accord and learning to live effectively when they are present.

9a. If I can't suppress or get rid of a negative emotional reaction, it's a sign of personal failure or weakness. 9b. The need to control or get rid of a negative emotional reaction is a problem in itself.

10a. Having negative thoughts and feelings is an indication that I'm psychologically unhealthy or I've got problems. 10b. Having negative thoughts and feelings means I'm a normal human being.

11a. People who are in control of their lives can generally control how they feel.
11b. People who are in control of their lives do not need to control their feelings.

12a. It is not okay to feel anxious and I try hard to avoid it. 12b. I don't like anxiety, but it's okay to feel it.

13a. Negative thoughts and feelings are a sign that there is something wrong with my life. 13b. Negative thoughts and feelings are an inevitable part of life for everyone.

14a. I have to feel good before I can do something that's important and challenging.
14b. I can do something that's important and challenging even if I'm feeling anxious or depressed.

15a. I try to suppress thoughts and feelings that I don't like by just not thinking about them.
15b. I don't try to suppress thoughts and feelings that I don't like. I just let them come and go of their own accord.

To score your test, count the number of times you selected option "a" or "b."

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